



ALASKA FISHING VESSEL SAFETY ALERT 01-99

SINKING OF F/V WITH THREE LIVES *LOST IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA*

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Fishing Vessel Safety Alert program was developed to provide timely safety-related information to fishermen of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties.

Incident: A 48’ fiberglass fishing vessel, rigged for the winter red king crab fishery laden with 20 pots, departed Petersburg the evening of 31 October enroute Seymour Canal to rendezvous with another crab vessel. The vessel, manned by the owner and two crew, sailed into heavy weather that evening with gale warnings forecast. The owner purchased the vessel in July 99 and borrowed a liferaft and EPIRB for this voyage. The liferaft had not been serviced within the last year and the safety equipment was not installed properly. The reported conditions in Frederick Sound that evening were seas of 20 feet and 70 knot winds. On Tuesday afternoon the Coast Guard was notified the vessel had not made it’s scheduled rendezvous. No MAYDAYs were received indicating the vessel likely capsized and sank quickly. No EPIRB alert was detected in the area during this time. A major water and land search was conducted over the next several days with CG cutters and aircraft as well as National Guard aircraft and local fishing vessels in the area. Only one crewmember was found. He was deceased. The liferaft was located on the beach unopened. Search teams found the EPRIB but it was not activated or transmitting when found. The vessel did not have a current Coast Guard voluntary dockside fishing vessel exam.

Lessons Learned: While the cause of the casualty is unknown, there are several lessons learned.

1. Mariners should make a risk assessment before getting underway and assess the weather and vessel’s condition to determine if the voyage can be safely conducted or should be delayed.
2. The National Weather Service (NWS) has advised Alaskans should expect more extreme storms over the next 10 years due to La Nina conditions. To highlight the severity of storms, the NWS is now using the term “hurricane force” winds in addition to “storm warnings” when warranted to emphasize severe weather conditions.
3. A properly serviced and installed EPIRB and liferaft can greatly improve the success of rescue operations. While a liferaft is not required to be carried on this vessel for its intended voyage, the Coast Guard strongly urges a liferaft, inflatable buoyant apparatus or a skiff be carried by all fishing vessels operating in Alaska. Liferafts should be serviced annually and attached to the vessel with a hydrostatic release or in a float free position with a weak link so that the liferaft will inflate automatically. With respect to EPIRBS, they should be installed and tested on a monthly basis in accordance with manufacturers’ instructions.
4. The vessel did not have a current CG dockside exam. The last exam was performed more than three years ago. These exams help identify deficiencies with safety equipment and systems on board. These exams are performed at the dock, free of charge, with no penalties.